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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 003231

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: KING MEETS IRAQI JOURNALISTS; STRESSES COMMITMENT TO BORDER SECURITY

REF: A. AMMAN 3048

[1](#)B. AMMAN 2218

Classified By: CDA David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (U) King Abdullah received a group of Iraqi journalists on April 18, stressing that Jordan is doing its utmost to protect its border with Iraq and prevent terrorist infiltrations. The journalists, in Jordan for a conference with local counterparts, also met the PM and speaker of the Lower House of Parliament. The King called on local media to report more responsibly on Iraqi issues, and claimed that inaccurate reporting is responsible for tensions in the Iraqi-Jordanian relationship. End Summary.

GOJ ROLLS OUT THE RED CARPET FOR IRAQI JOURNALISTS

[1](#)2. (U) Keeping in line with his active strategy to improve strained Jordanian-Iraqi ties (ref A), King Abdullah hosted a lunch for a group of Iraqi journalists on April 18, during which he emphasized the GOJ is doing all it can to prevent terrorist infiltrations into Iraq from Jordan. Stressing that Jordan's "historical and brotherly" ties with Iraq are "too strong to be sabotaged," he said: "Jordan will always be the primary backer of Iraq and Iraqis' aspirations.... Restoring Iraq's security and stability is key to Jordan and the entire region." The meeting was widely covered by local media, receiving front-page coverage in most dailies.

[1](#)3. (U) For their part, the Iraqi media representatives, attending a conference at the Dead Sea with their Jordanian counterparts, reportedly said the visit enhanced their belief in Jordan as "the real backer of the Iraqi people." Hussein Adeli, an Iraqi Media and Communications Commission official, characterized the meeting with the King as "warm." He told Jordan TV that, "We are confident that ties between Jordan and Iraq will witness progress in all fields." Ismail Zayer, chief editor of al-Sabah al-Jadid newspaper, was quoted in one of the Jordanian dailies as saying, "there are certain powers that benefit from a bad relationship between Jordan and Iraq." He urged continuous communication between media institutions in both countries, as "the enormous changes in Iraq worry our brothers in Jordan." Director of the Iraqi Media Network Habib Sadr commented that "Jordan's media fell short of clarifying the balanced official stand of Jordan towards Iraq."

[1](#)4. (U) The journalists met separately with PM Badran on April 19. Badran urged the Iraqi and Jordanian journalists to "remove impurities that might appear in bilateral ties." He said Jordan and Iraq "share the same destiny," adding that the "flourishing" freedom of expression, as well as political and intellectual pluralism, in Iraq would enhance ties between the two countries. The Iraqis also met separately with Lower House Speaker Abdul Hadi Majali and Interior Ministry Secretary General Mkheimar Abu Jammous, and visited the editors-in-chief of Arab local dailies al-Rai and al-Ghad.

KING CLAIMS INACCURATE REPORTING FUELS TENSIONS

[1](#)5. (U) The King met with top Jordanian media representatives on April 19, telling them he held the media partially responsible for aggravating tension with Iraq. "Some journalists do not like to see our relationship with Iraq strong," he told the chief editors of local dailies and the director general of Jordan's official news agency, Petra. He complained that some columnists still remain "captive to the past," adding that "everyone should respect the will of the Iraqi people." (Comment: It is widely known that many of Jordan's leading journalists were on Saddam's payroll for years, until the removal of the Ba'ath regime. End Comment.) The King underscored the media's responsibility in advocating reform, but acknowledged that the GOJ had to do a

better job of providing information and creating an environment in which a free press could flourish.

16. (U) In a veiled reference to the Ra'ed al-Banna suicide bomber episode (ref B), the King called for more training for journalists to avoid "errors" in reporting. He also called for the Jordanian parliament to enact legislation that would prohibit jailing journalists on charges related to their job. This meeting also received front-page coverage in all dailies.

COMMENT

17. (C) The King's public statements on this issue comes against the backdrop of increasingly critical local coverage of the Iraqi "resistance." For example, al-Ghad ran a story based on interviews with Iraqi women from Hilla (in Jordan for a conference), who described the horrific aftermath of the suicide bombing there. However, the GOJ's public efforts continue to contrast with the opinions of some Jordanians. An Iraqi working with a German development organization in Jordan shared with poloffs his shock as an acquaintance from Salt (al-Banna's home town) exalted the "heroic" effort of "one of their own" on behalf of the "Iraqi resistance." The Salti was sheepish as the Iraqi chastised his "blind support" for the "resistance," which he explained is killing mostly innocent civilians. The Iraqi lamented that the pro-insurgency sentiment is well-ingrained among many ordinary Jordanians, and it will take more than just public statements to change attitudes.

18. (U) Minimize considered.

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HALE